

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbct-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php)

## The 1960s Remembered

FR ALEKSANDR MEN'

### 1960: Rumours about Imminent Reforms

For the past 15 to 17 years, if not longer, church life has been under immense pressure.<sup>1</sup> The years 1960–1 come first to mind. At that time I was serving in a church in Alabino (Petrovskoye village on the Kiev road) and it was there that I first learned of the patriarchate's decision to give all the rights and powers of the parishes to so-called church soviets, or executive organs.

### The Priests Protest

This aroused some commotion among the clergy and there were protests. These became more frequent when the patriarch issued an order that responsibility for all the economic and administrative aspects, in fact practically all power, was to pass to laymen supposedly chosen by the *dvadtsatka* [group of twenty people responsible for the parish – Ed.]. Fr Igor' Malyushinsky, an archpriest in Moscow, wrote a letter to the patriarch. I did not see it myself as it was a personal and not an open letter. It read, 'Your Holiness! The church's management arrangements were established at the 1945 Church Council (*sobor*) and your individual decision cannot annul this resolution.'

### Bishop Germogen: the Archbishops Attempt to Protest

Of all the hierarchs, Bishop Germogen enjoyed the greatest respect. During Khrushchev's persecution of the church he managed to avoid closing any of the churches in his diocese, and in fact he lost his position precisely because he refused to cooperate. The plenipotentiary said to him, 'If you close just one church, you will be promoted, rewarded.' His answer was no. By his efforts the cathedral in Tashkent was not only restored but even widened and considerably increased in size; in fact, it was rebuilt. Germogen, a graduate of our academy, once studied under Florensky and wrote a thesis on the psychology of martyrdom based on early Christian texts. He was a man of aristocratic appearance, tall and slim with long grey hair. He had an extremely high opinion of the bishop's vocation and believed that a bishop should be a real sovereign in the church. He was young in spirit despite his advanced years and he took seriously many things which did not in fact deserve to be taken seriously. He now gathered together several bishops – eight if I am not mistaken. I think Pavel Golyshev (Novosibirsk), now emigrated, was one of them. The others are also known

by name. They wrote a letter to the patriarch protesting against this illegal decision. The patriarch called Bishop Germogen to him and pressure began to be put on him. All the other bishops withdrew their signatures, leaving him alone, in order to prevent a scandal.

### **1961: the Bishops' Council Carries out the Reforms**

A Bishops' Council was hastily summoned, with the ostensible right to annul the resolution of the 1945 Council. As we know, the Bishops' Council passed a resolution changing the way in which church communities were run. I will not say any more about that council as a great deal has already been written about it. The effect it had on the parishes is more important than the organisation of the council itself, which is what has chiefly been criticised. It really wasn't a council at all as the clergy did not understand what it was all about. They had been celebrating services, they were summoned and asked to sign something, and it was all over in the twinkling of an eye.

The bishops were presented with the following argument: why should priests have to do all these administrative chores? Give them to the churchwardens. Nobody understood the resolution as our bishops have a very limited understanding of parish life. I have heard that in the West a bishop will spend some time every year in a parish as an ordinary priest. If this is so, then it is very good. In our country many bishops have only the haziest idea about what an ordinary parish working priest actually does. Therefore many of them were easily able to agree with the proposed reform. Any who were expected to disagree, such as Bishop Luka of Simferopol', were by one means or another prevented from attending the Council. One was not informed, another... generally they made sure that any potential opponents were not admitted. It must be said that the patriarch himself was not in favour of the reform, but he was very old and his brain was in the clutches of sclerosis. It was possible to convince him about anything, so in the end he agreed and even began to think it a good idea.

### **The Shady Side of the Pre-reform Situation**

I was 26 years old and had been a priest only for a few years. However, I had worked for many years in diocesan administration and knew all about the so-called 'shady side'. I understood, of course, how the reform would affect the parishes and how absurd it was to grant such extensive powers to the church elders. Yet there was also another angle to the whole issue.

On the evidence of my observations at that time, things were hardly any better when priests were in charge. Most of them did not even have enough taste to decorate a church in the appropriate manner. Churches were painted in monstrous styles. Nowadays we blame the churchwarden, but at a time when churchwardens were just spare wheels the priests just did what they wanted. The old did not understand what was required and neither did the young. So the majority of the churches in Moscow – those which were not taken over by secular organs for the protection of historical monuments or something – were daubed barbarously. In the Patriarchal Yelokhovskiy cathedral the walls are still decorated in the style of nineteenth-century German and French prints. How can they talk about Orthodox art, about icon painting? The remarkable church of St Nicholas in Khamovniki on Komsomol'skiy prospekt, which looks like a toy, is painted inside in the style of Gustave Doré and Julius Schnorre. I

have nothing against Doré or Schnorre, but everything has its place!

This shows that priests were by no means ideal managers of the parishes. Many of them used the church cash boxes with a free rein and became indecently rich. In general, things were not in best shape during those years... I think the whole thing was somehow providential... When I attended church as a small boy, there was a box, a safe, on the altar, where people put roubles. The priest threw the roubles into it as if it were nothing to him. Everything was out of control and it seemed to me, young though I was, that they were turning faith into a factory for making money.

### **Attempts to Activate Parish Life after the War**

In the first few years after the war many priests gave series of talks in their churches, on sacred history, on the sacraments. Fr Andrei Rastorguyev gave an excellent exegesis of the Gospels. Every Sunday evening he would read a passage from the Gospels, in succession, one after another, and explain it with the help of a Bible Concordance which was published by the 'Strannik' publishing house. Fr Aleksandr Smirnov, thanks to his connections with state organs, even received permission to put up a screen just like a cinema screen in the church of St Nicholas in Kuznetsky and every Sunday evening he showed colour slides, narrating sacred history and interpreting the sacraments. People came crowding in; people were even fainting. But this was just all after the war, until about 1950. It did not come to anything. The old priests began to die and the new ones did not continue. But they still took money, 'raking it in' as people say, with the same success.

### **The Fundamental Reasons Why Parish Life Was Destroyed**

Things were not particularly good, then; so when Fr Gleb [Yakunin] and Fr Nikolai [Eshliman] were sharply critical of the 1961 Council they ought, in my view, to have been just as critical of the 1945 Council, which created a fictitious democracy in the parishes. 'Churchwardens' and 'assistant churchwardens' – all this had no significance, the priest was everything. Whose fault was this? The whole set-up was at fault. The 'dvadtsatka' had been a fiction for a long time. According to Soviet law the 'dvadtsatka' – the group of 20 – is the parish; that is, it is a society that can demand the opening of a church when it consists of *not fewer* than 20 members. It may have 500 or 10 000 members, that is irrelevant, but it cannot have fewer than 20. What happened next, however, was that this entity took on a fictitious identity as a 'dvadtsatka'. What is more, it usually consisted of semi-invalid elderly women, because ordinary people were afraid to join. So the 'dvadtsatka' was incapable of representing the parish.

### **The Reform and the Parish in Alabino**

To tell the truth, things did not work out so badly in our parish. The churchwarden had just died, and I promoted the election of a woman who relied on me completely. It was only thanks to this state of affairs that we succeeded in bringing about complete revolution in the church – superficial, but interesting. I painted over all the ugly images on the walls. I asked the best icon painters to replace the icons. We replaced almost all of them; Mariya Nikolayevna Sokolova painted one icon for us. I decided against icon paintings on the walls so as not to scare people off. The average simple person no longer understands or loves icons. This is not something which has hap-

pened recently, but the result of a 300-year absence of icon paintings in churches. I acted with caution, therefore, and had the walls decorated 'in the style of Vasnetsov'. I did the sketches myself and invited an artist from Moscow. Thousands of illegitimate roubles were needed for this because he could not draw on the payroll. We developed a routine: I put an old person on guard while the artist climbed quickly up the scaffolding and painted. If anyone appeared I locked up from the outside. But usually everything went well, and soon all the church walls were painted. He painted the Day of Judgment in the style of Vasnetsov for me in a month, from one end of the wall to another. I gave him some money, he went to Kiev, saw the original Vasnetsov, came back with a photograph and painted it. We gilded all the icon cases, repainted the iconostasis, replaced the gates; we bought Czech vases which looked like chalices and made icon lamps out of them. So that they would not burn the icons we made brass bases and hung them on small chains. It all turned out to be very effective.

I 'banished the traders from the temple'. It was a small church built in the last century by Prince Meshchersky. We took the 'box' outside into the churchyard. We put the old lady in a solid wooden hut with a small window in it. So she was dealing with money outside the church. We set up a chapel in the church where the 'box' had been and performed funerals there. On Saturdays I told the people about the creed, prayers and the form of the service. Things developed gradually, day by day; we were not trying to create any kind of effect. Eventually my fellow priests, Fr Sergi and Fr Vladimir, were happy to join in too.

We connected the church heating system to the porter's lodge, which we made into a separate reception room for receiving visitors and so on. For the Easter procession round the church (*Krestny Khod*) we gathered a lot of old icons and fixed them to sticks with nails so that when the procession set off it looked like a demonstration. We would get a couple of dozen young people together and we had some impressive processions. The churchwarden did not interfere at all; he allowed us to do anything. So the reform did not mean anything to us at all. Things were bad in other places, though.

### **The Parish in Alabino: Fr Vladimir Rozhkov**

I can now see that the 1961 reform did not have the fatal consequences it might have had, in that things did not in fact get worse for the parishes. Before there had been absolute self-government; now it was relative. The priest had only the archbishop above him, but he communicated with him through the rural dean (*blagochinny*), who often turned out to be under the influence of various 'secondary factors', and so this system did not work.

Our senior priest left and I became the senior. I wanted to invite someone close to my own heart, and they sent me Fr Vladimir Rozhkov, who had only just been ordained: a short, thin man. We served together only for a short time. After two months he was enticed away to a better position in Pushkino. But at first he served with great willingness and zeal, and in the evenings he led discussions. (I said to him, 'Here is your theme. Talk!' And he talked.) That was the honeymoon period of his priesthood.

When he had gone, we began to wonder who to invite to our 'abbey'. We jokingly called our church an 'abbey', because I lived in the parish and wrote my never-ending books at a little table in the garden. Everyone gathered there, and we were completely surrounded by walls.

### **The Parish in Alabino: Sermons at Burial Services**

We even had a church car. They overlooked it when they confiscated all the cars because we lived in a large region (20 or 30 kilometres in diameter) and there would be five or six burial services a day. I always took advantage of these occasions to give a sermon to the people, whether in the cemetery or at home. This was then banned but we were allowed to continue, because when the ban was introduced I did something rather cunning. I took advantage of having to conduct a burial service in the house of an employee of the District Executive Committee. He came to see me with a gift – a bottle or something – and produced a piece of paper saying that the District Committee would not object to this particular case. That was the end of that, because if they did not object in this one instance, then... People kept going for permission, so a kind of office was created. When the local plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Affairs summoned me, threatening thunder and lightning, I pulled out huge piles of papers. Each of my funeral visits had been documented. I had been given permission for ‘this particular case’ constantly. I had about 250 of these pieces of paper.

### **The Parish in Alabino: the Attempt to Infiltrate Fr Serafim Golubtsov**

I did not want an outsider to come to the abbey, because our lifestyle and rhythm were already established. I wanted to work with Fr Sergi Khokhlov, with whom I had celebrated since 1950, and he came to work with me with great joy.

However, Fr Serafim Golubtsov asked to be placed here. I did not know him, but it later turned out that he was a typical Soviet ‘provocateur’, a man who had imprisoned many people. It was all hanging by a thread; naively, I did not suspect him. Metropolitan Pitirim summoned us. Golubtsov sat opposite me. The metropolitan said, ‘We are appointing Fr Serafim to you. Golubtsov is older than you and a more experienced priest, but you are the senior priest.’ Golubtsov said quickly, ‘I will take second place.’ I replied, ‘I would be very happy to take him on, so to speak, but our churchwarden wants Khokhlov.’ ‘Well, if that’s what the churchwarden wants,’ replied the metropolitan, ‘then there is nothing to be done.’ The new ruling had of course just appeared. Serafim ‘went under cover’, and we met again only years later.

### **The Parish in Alabino: Fr Sergi Khokhlov**

Serezha came and this was the happiest time of his life. He served in a manner to be envied: he had a wonderful voice, he loved celebrating services, the ‘cult’ in secular language. I put him in charge of giving sermons; I just chose good texts for him. He erected a lectern. I always spoke from a lectern. We had made a wooden pulpit on a carved leg and when he spoke, he went up into it, so that he was speaking *ex cathedra*. His voice was deeper than Fr Antoni’s, whom he imitated in his intonation. It was wonderful. He was a great help to me, although he was occasionally late for services: he needed a lot of sleep, because he was a diabetic. But on the whole he served admirably and may God grant that he will always do so. I even got him to chat with people and he did so willingly and successfully.

Fr Sergi was very courageous and helped me to decorate the church. We organised all kinds of decoration, not just on the outside of the building. For example, we wrote all the prayers out in big, beautiful letters, put them into half-metre frames and hung them in the vestibule. On the other side we hung a notice telling people how to

behave in church, how to stand, how to enter. When our village council built a road, I promised to give them money to help them and requested that they build a toilet on their land so that people would not use our church as one – we were just across a fence from the club and the village council. They used our money to build a big brick toilet with a hole three metres deep. People reached it through the wicket-gate and it was fenced off. All was well.

### **Crises in Church Life: the Death of Metropolitan Nikolai**

Church life in general was suffering constant crises and disruptions. At about this time, Metropolitan Nikolai [of Leningrad] died. At the funeral one foreigner said, 'I had not realised that he was so disliked.' Indeed, nobody cried. Metropolitan Nikolai was a splendid person and a remarkable bishop, but he was a loner and trusted nobody. He spent his whole life alone. There was only one woman in his life; she was his godmother or his nurse, from the old aristocracy. She was the only person close to him. His death was tragic because he did everything he could to ingratiate himself in the eyes of the Council for Religious Affairs and those in power, but as soon as he ceased to be useful he was dismissed – and that was that. He was terribly insulted and said, 'I don't understand, I just don't understand!' He could not reconcile himself to the fact that someone who had appeared in Soviet films, who had represented the USSR at numerous congresses, who was considered one of the best speakers and whose speeches were published in *Pravda* could suddenly be left lying in his little wooden house on Baumanskaya Street, no longer of use to anyone.

### **The Departure of A. V. Vedernikov**

Soon after this Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov was removed from his editorial post at the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. Changes began to take place generally. Anatoli Vasil'yevich had given me opportunity to publish articles in the journal. The first of them appeared in 1959. I published chapters of *Syn chelovechesky* (*The Son of Man*), which I wrote in about 1960, as articles in the *JPM*.

### **Organising a Circle of Priests**

I felt that something unusual was going on: an internal schism had developed between the clergy on the one hand and the episcopate and the 'official' church on the other. We ceased trusting them as practically all the bishops went along with the reforms. At the end of 1962, I think, I decided to change the situation somehow. It all began most innocently. I had several friends among the clergy who had not graduated from theological school, and I had myself only studied at the academy by correspondence. I therefore made a proposal: 'Sometimes we meet at festivals or visit one another on our namedays, so why don't we meet to discuss theological questions which particularly interest us, and also our pastoral experiences. We don't have an academy, but we can be an academy for each other.' Everyone agreed: Fr Dmitri Dudko, Fr Nikolai Eshliman, Gleb Yakunin and some others, maybe a dozen in all. They began to visit me in Alabino and sometimes we met at their homes. The conversations actually stayed within the suggested framework. Some shared problems that had arisen in confession, others brought up theological questions which people had asked them and which they could not answer. But we always ended up discussing what we would do without any bishops. To say that the bishops had betrayed

us would be too strong, but I kept insisting that a church without any bishops was unnatural. Bishops are the successors of the apostles, and we are just their helpers.

### **Bishop Germogen**

In order to find some way out of this distressing situation, I wrote to Bishop Germogen. I said something like the following: ‘*Vladyka*, we have followed your activities over many years and we have noticed that you have stood up for the churches and that you did not agree with this Bishops’ Council... Although we belong to a different diocese, we want to ask you to be our spiritual – not administrative, but spiritual – bishop. Then we would feel our church situation to be more natural.’ I wrote on behalf of four people: Dudko, Eshliman, Gleb and myself. The bishop (at that time bishop of Kaluga) answered in a very friendly manner and promised to visit. He came to Alabino just as we were repairing the church. He looked round the church and then we sat down together.

During this meeting the bishop said that the Moscow Patriarchate was under the sign of Renovationism, and that these same Renovationists had the same old programme of renewal, accommodation with the authorities and so on. He was generally very critical of the patriarchate. We understood all this and said, ‘We have no intention of attacking or criticising the patriarchate. If you will be “our” bishop, when we have the sort of problems that priests encounter and with which they need the help of a bishop, we will come to you.’ With this we parted very warmly and life flowed on.

### **Fr Nikolai Eshliman**

This was the period when Fr Nikolai Eshliman was in full bloom. He too had been ordained comparatively recently. I wrote a short biography of him and circulated it at the time when there was a lot of talk about him and Fr Gleb, including the most fantastic rumours about their origins. In order to stop these, I put together short biographies of them both. A famous magazine got hold of them and they were published about ten years ago. Fr Nikolai Eshliman was a very original man. I met him in 1956 and we hit it off from the beginning. He was an aristocrat at heart, a person with magnificent, aristocratic manners and something of the artist about him. He played the piano, sculpted, drew – he had something of the Bohemian in him. He had an ancestor who was a famous Scot of some kind, and another was some kind of Georgian prince. His mother was a noblewoman, also of famous descent. His was a complicated road in search of God, looking into mysticism and the occult. He had an excellent, fine bass and sang in church. His wife was a very lively, pretty and fashionable woman. Her name was Ira and she was the granddaughter of the famous politician Count Witte. Their room, which was in a house on Dmitrovka, Pushkin Street, opposite the Kolonny Zal, was like a salon where interesting people were always gathering to drink and to talk, as was the habit in Moscow in those days. You met the most astonishing people there.

Eshliman had a wide if superficial knowledge of many subjects. He was exceptionally fascinating, adaptable and attractive to everyone, and everyone said ‘Nikolai Nikolayevich’ in a reverent undertone. When I was still serving in Akulov one young scholar asked me, ‘Do you know Nikolai Eshliman?’ and it was just as if he were asking, ‘Do you know Aleksandr Pushkin?’ At that time, I did not know him.

I became acquainted with him through Volodya Rozhkov, who was then a student at the seminary. Nikolai had recently entered the church. I immediately sensed that



he was a man of the intelligentsia. He is about four or five years older than me. As often happens with people cast in an aristocratic mould, however, he never finished anything – for example, his artistic education. He played the piano a little – in fact he played well, inspiringly even – he drew a little. He had many projects: painting this or sculpting that, creating something else. He considered himself an artist; he decorated churches. He sang a little. He did everything ‘a little’, but still everything turned out charmingly. Everyone was captivated by him. We became great friends.

Eshliman was transformed by the priesthood, and discovered himself. All the murk in him was washed away as if it had never been. It was hard for him. When as a simple church cantor he was requesting ordination he began to visit the chancellory of the patriarchate, where Archimandrite Nikodim, now Metropolitan of Leningrad, was in charge. In those days – I do not know what it is like now – the archimandrite distinguished himself by a monstrous capacity for red tape. He kept Eshliman waiting for a month. Perhaps he now thinks (if he remembers) that he had a presentiment of how things would turn out, but in any case, day after day Eshliman went there as if he were going to work and each day they said to him, ‘Come back tomorrow.’ But Pimen – Izvekov, now patriarch – took a liking to him. He adored Nikolai Nikolayevich’s singing and was generally well disposed to him in every possible way. Nikolai Nikolayevich himself extolled Pimen and told the most touching anecdotes about him. For example, there is the story of how an employee in the chancellory complained to Pimen that he had been insulted by someone. Pimen answered, ‘If a camel at the zoo had spat at you, who would you have gone to complain to?’ A woman came to him and said, ‘Fr Pimen, our priest does not take off his cross when he goes to the toilet.’ He answered, ‘And you, when you go to the toilet at home, do you take off yours?’ Or the story of how Pimen built an iconostasis in the *Lavra*. The plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Affairs came to him and asked, ‘How could you build an iconostasis without our permission?’ ‘It’s furniture,’ Pimen answered, ‘it’s made on wheels so you can pull it out with a tractor.’ I do not know if these stories are true, but Nikolai told them with such animation and with such love for the active, energetic, clever Pimen. Later, Pimen changed. His health was sapped and he lost all these qualities; but at that time, as a recently ordained young bishop, he was going to get Eshliman ordained by hook or by crook. He told him to travel to Kostroma (at that time he was temporarily bishop of Kostroma), ordained him and transferred him to Moscow ‘like lightning’, as they say.

Eshliman celebrated the liturgy in a simply staggering way. Firstly, he had such a voice. Secondly, he was inspired to extraordinary prayers. He was always attracted to the mystical and to mystification. He was always telling me stories about how an altar lamp had lit itself, how... he got carried away by things like that; I regarded all this with indulgence because I loved him. However, I always warned him that mysticism of this kind is just one step away from mystification. He would tell me with great excitement about various dreams nuns had in his church, about apparitions of the devil in some form or another. Any kind of demonology held a strong attraction for him. But nobody celebrated the liturgy like he did. He was an excellent preacher. His congregation loved him. He served in Kurkino, where Fr Stefan Serebny was also a priest. This large parish was strictly speaking in Moscow, and was later transferred to Moscow itself. I attended his services and saw for myself how the people loved him, because he was a gentleman in the best sense of the word. The parishioners sensed the ‘lord’ in him. They sensed it immediately, psychologically.

He really was a ‘lord’ and he accepted this as natural. The psychology of us members of the intelligentsia is different. Once we were in a cafe. Self-service was just

being introduced. I said, 'Let's get some trays.' He said, 'I can't do that. Waitress, come here!' And he called the girl over. Everyone was standing in the queue and he was sitting there negotiating with the girl for her to come and serve us. It was not that he was too lazy to get up; it was just his nature to be like that. I cannot even say that it was rude. He had a natural charm. As Rozhkov said, there were three famous gourmet cooks in Moscow and Eshliman was the second of them. He cooked some heavenly dishes! He read a lot and caught on quickly. He would browse through *Nauka i zhizn'* (*Science and Life*) and then tell you what was in it as though he were an expert.

Fr Nikolai and I were together constantly in those days. There was no one with whom I was so close. What is more, this friendship became somehow telepathic. We would compare the sermons we had given on the same day and find we had said the same thing. In essence, though, we were very different people. He was a convert, I had been a churchgoer since childhood. He was an aristocrat, I was not. And so on, and so on. There were many differences. Yet somehow we became very close friends, worked together, met to discuss church affairs – parish matters mostly. I insisted we discuss parish matters as the parish is the priest's work in the church.

### **1958–1962: the Height of the Antireligious Campaign**

The year 1958 saw the start of a tempestuous antireligious campaign under Khrushchev. It began just after I was ordained. I fell into the torrent immediately. Churches were closed down and the press was full of vicious attacks, which gave rise to the first *samizdat* responses. Zheludkov wrote one of his masterpieces, a wonderful open letter to the priest Darmansky, who had renounced holy orders. Apostate priests launched their attacks; they were answered by Levitin and Zheludkov. One of them, Chertkov, wrote in *Nauka i religiya* abusing me and my articles in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* for disguising science as religion (even though I tried to be very restrained in what I wrote).

As editor of the *JMP*, Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov used to order all press cuttings relating to religion from a special agency. The agency is obliged to send all the appropriate articles. During those years it stopped sending them to the *JMP* because cuttings on religion became too numerous for it to collate them all. There were no newspapers, even *Sovetsky sport* or the local party rag, which were not publishing daily on religion. I calculated that during those years antireligious propaganda reached the point where six or seven new books were appearing every day, each in a print run of millions. Every day! It was like direct fire from a rocket launcher. Churches were closed in appalling circumstances: they broke into them and destroyed everything. I am sure the authorities did not issue orders that the churches were to be closed in this way. They said, 'Close the churches in a cultured and civilised manner, sparing the feelings of believers.' But when the local authorities gave the orders, the believers were crushed. All this caused tremendous offence and Anatoli Emmanuilovich Levitin-Krasnov first came to the fore in publicising what was happening. I became acquainted with him through Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov.

### **Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov**

I first met Vedernikov in 1947 when he was the inspector of the Moscow Theological Seminary. I went to see him hoping to sort out whether I could go and study there (I

was still at school then). A young man with a very handsome profile was sitting there: Anatoli Vasil'yevich. There was a small black and white portrait of Stalin. There was a lectern with an antique Bible on it and various other books. He told me: 'You are still so young! You will be eighteen when you finish your studies.' (I was then barely fourteen.) 'Come back then.' At that time Anatoli Vasil'yevich was giving a course on the history of Russian religious thought at the Academy, which was still located in the Novodevichi Monastery.

A year later Anatoli Vasil'yevich was removed, and the Academy was transferred; and the history of religious thought, alas! They removed him for several reasons. One was apparently that his wife was a repatriate. It was then the Stalin era and this was viewed as a terrible crime although she was a quite ordinary woman, active in the lay work of the church, from a parish in Paris but very pro-Moscow, even pro-Soviet, in her orientation. Nevertheless, they still blackmarked him. He was on the whole an active, lively man, but very flexible and capable of accommodating himself anywhere; nevertheless, an intelligent man with a pure religious faith.

He was rather conservative, but healthily so, open to different views. He remains so even now. I have always had a very good impression of him; I have always loved and valued him. In 1956, when I was in the third year of my course, I came to Moscow. I had been testing the ground to find out my chances of getting into the seminary. I went to Bishop Leonid, who received me most kindly. I told him that when I had completed my studies I wanted to train and serve as a priest, and that I wanted to do some preparation in advance: what possibility was there? 'I am not Russian according to my passport,' I warned him. 'What does that matter?' he said. On that visit I met Anatoli Vasil'yevich for the second time. He was working as editor of the *JMP*. Metropolitan Nikolai was the official editor and Anatoli Vasil'yevich was the secretary, but that is practically the same thing.

### **Anatoli Emmanuilovich Krasnov-Levitin**

In 1956 I went to the editorial offices of the Moscow Patriarchate, and was just about to look in on the editor when I overheard someone talking to him in a high-pitched voice. 'Well, you know that living with someone will end either in scandal or a legal marriage. What's it going to be with you?' The editor answered with some unclear comment; evidently neither of those things would happen, but he would continue as before. A man wearing very powerful glasses (he obviously had very poor eyesight) then emerged and sat down on the sofa. He looked somewhat dishevelled. He began to talk to me immediately, announcing that he had just returned from the *gulag*, that he had been a Renovationist deacon, that he was now working as a teacher, that he was writing articles in the *JMP* under a pseudonym. I replied, 'My dear man, you do not know me and yet you are telling me all of this when we have only just met. Why?' 'The editor told me all about you,' he said. 'What are you doing?' 'I'm studying,' I replied. 'I'm a student and I would like to be a priest.' 'You're in such a hurry,' he told me (I was 21). 'The priesthood would not suit you at all.'

We set off together on foot, walking from the Novodevichi Monastery to the Kremlin, and he told me the whole story which he subsequently published as a book, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi tserkovnoi smuty* (*The Russian Church Troubles: Historical Sketches*). He seemed very lively and I was struck by his cheerful optimism, having survived all the vicissitudes of labour camp. I sensed that he had been shaken up psychologically, and I soon discovered I was right. There had been a difficult conflict between his father, a Jew who had accepted official baptism before the

revolution but who did not become a Christian and had a negative attitude towards religion, and his mother, who was Russian and threw his father over immediately because she could not stand Jews. He himself had been a Christian since childhood, since birth; and therefore everyone had been against him. He comprised all these complexes, which always tormented him; but at the same time he was cheerful and of positive good spirits.

‘How much further can things go?’ I asked him. ‘You see how they have begun to put pressure on us. What will happen?’ ‘It’s all nonsense,’ said Anatoli Emmanuilovich, ‘I can see that all that is happening now is nonsense. Everything will turn out all right. A new generation is being born.’ ‘But I don’t see it yet.’ ‘No, but you will!’ And he was right. It did not exist in 1956; everyone was still sitting in corners. As Levitin said, ‘It is still weak, young and green and easy to crush, but all the same it is young.’

We parted as friends and met often after that. The only time we ever quarrelled was because he offended me by his incredible language and we had a cooling off for some time. But we made peace again. Anatoli Emmanuilovich had some straightforward, primitive views, which were fully atoned for by their integrity. Snobbish people who considered themselves theologically refined of course thought he was primitive. But his primitiveness was much higher than their refinement because he was a person of integrity. He had integrity of thought, consciousness, faith, spiritual experience and personality, and all this despite the controversies I have just mentioned. What is more, these controversies were not limited to his family, because he was a socialist. He stood for socialism, which, if I understand correctly, he mistook for communism. He was a socialist and a Christian and wanted to combine the two. One might think that such a person could hardly exhibit integrity. But he did!

At that time the first pamphlet by the apostate Duluman appeared, entitled *Pochemu ya perestal verit’ v boga* (*Why I Stopped Believing in God*). Emmanuilovich gave him a harsh lashing for it. That was how *samizdat* began. He then started writing sharp denunciatory articles. He replied to almost all the trivial defamatory articles in the press in his own style, which was just as abusive. He wrote in the Soviet style, like a Soviet pamphlet, using all the Soviet tricks. Unfortunately, one of these tricks did him a bad turn: he did not always check his facts. For example, in the remarkable pamphlet *Kuda ty idesh, Volodya?* (*Where are you going, Volodya?*) he made what in my opinion were completely groundless accusations. He became most famous for the pamphlet in defence of the Pochayev Lavra, where terrible things were happening. People gathered there to pray but the police arrived in cars, drove them into the countryside and left them there. They persecuted the monks and did dreadful things. Anatoli Emmanuilovich worked hard to defend the monastery. He wrote to all the authorities and some of the monks sent letters abroad. At that time no one in the Soviet Union was in open contact with the West. The monks’ appeals were in cryptic language and not always accurate. Copies of these letters fell into the hands of Eshliman and myself.

### **How the Idea of a Letter Arose**

One day at the height of all these troubles we were taking a walk in our park. I said to Fr Nikolai, ‘Why should these poor people have to write the letters? Let’s gather the facts ourselves and write fully and authoritatively so that people know the truth.’ He was ecstatic at the idea and kissed me in his enthusiasm. We then met Dudko and some others and began to put the plan into action. In the end, though, we started

thinking 'Why deal with this particular case when we need to find the root of the problem? The root of the evil is the connivance of our bishops. The church leaders who ought to be fighting for the interests of the church are not doing so. Now that power has been handed to the churchwardens, any churchwarden can close a church tomorrow if he so desires. The local executive committee summons him and tells him to close it for whatever reason they like. And that is the end of it. It all goes back to the Bishops' Council of 1961. Somehow we must protest about all this.' Everyone began to think the matter over.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': Vasya Fonchenkov**

Meanwhile, there was a 'misunderstanding' in our parish, which put our 'abbey' in the line of fire and destroyed everything. Nikolai Eshliman had a friend, a historian, Vasya Fonchenkov, the son of a party worker who was famous enough for his black-framed portrait to appear in the papers after his death. Vasya Fonchenkov was a rather adventurous young man. He was often at Nikolai Nikolayevich's. He was a historian by education; he had studied at the university and was working at the museum of the reconstruction of Moscow. He was fond of his tsarist surname. He reminisced about it, and generally liked talking about the monarchy. At first his interest was that of a historian, but later he became generally fascinated by the subject. I did not have a particular relationship with him, but if I visited Nikolai, he was usually there, with something new to tell you. He was forever collecting rare museum pieces and was always out and about. Although he had been christened as a child, by his grandmother if I am not mistaken, he had embraced the church and Christianity only relatively recently.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': Lev Lebedev**

One day Vasya Fonchenkov came to see me in my abbey and said, 'I have a friend.' It seems they had studied together. 'He is also a historian. His name is Lev Lebedev. He is on the academic staff of the Novy Iyerusalim museum. He has been converted to Orthodoxy and has been wondering whether to enter a seminary. He wants to give up his job and go into the church. He wants to start by becoming a psalm-singer. Take him on.' He had next to him a pale-faced youth with sticking-out ears, and a smile from ear to ear, who I sensed immediately was from the intelligentsia. He was very quick on the uptake, and spoke in an ingratiating manner. However, Vasya omitted to tell me the most important thing: that he was a terrible alcoholic. That's how it all began.

Lev Lebedev continued to live at the Novy Iyerusalim (New Jerusalem) monastery museum while coming to see us in Alabino. I taught him to read music and to sing and he became a psalm-singer. However, a while later something happened which, though unimportant in itself, made me quite concerned. He would ask me questions, and when I told him what I thought he would give only obscure replies. This kind of behaviour was already familiar to me from my contact with psychopaths. A psychopath is different from other people in that he cannot express his thoughts. He will speak clearly and eloquently to you, but you, the listener, cannot understand what he is trying to say and neither in fact can he. This is what Lev was like. He became more and more obscure. I would be saying one thing to him and he would be talking about something else.

Then one day there was a festival. People gathered together and had a few drinks. I

have never been against a good get-together with plenty to drink and have never had a puritanical attitude; and if I have come to find that whole thing less and less agreeable this is just because Russians do not know how to drink. Only people who know how to drink and get amicable pleasure from it should go in for this kind of thing. There is nothing worse than people who get drunk and say one thing, and then sober up and say something else. You cannot rely on people like that. Many's the time I would get together with people in our village for a few drinks. They would swear to me that they had faith in the depths of their souls and that they would come to church, but I never listened to them because I knew that as soon as they sobered up they would not come, not for anything. So there we were, lots of young people and various local lads sitting around, and our Lev Lebedev began holding forth eloquently about a booklet of his that had been published by '*Znaniye*'. Suddenly he started shouting and then he slipped to the ground and fell asleep. This was typical behaviour for alcoholics and it put me on my guard.

Then he came with his friends. They were very pleasant, lively and sociable, the kind of people who treat you as if they have known you all their life. They started off effusively but quickly got drunk and passed out. It was only later that I understood that they were a typical kind of 'intelligentsia alcoholic'. At the time, though, I did not think anything of it, I just thought he was tired and had got drunk – perhaps he had been drinking earlier. But gradually Fr Sergi and I began to see that all was not well. I began to find his attitude annoying. At the end of another festival he came to see me and said, 'Let's read some Tyutchev!' I had no time for this – I was tired and overloaded with work – but he seemed to have some sort of Bohemian monkey lurking in his soul, egging him on. 'Let's sit down and read Tyutchev.' Well, perhaps, there was nothing malicious in the suggestion. I am very fond of Tyutchev myself and I welcome poetry readings; but I didn't need Lev Lebedev to read Tyutchev to me. I can read him for myself.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': the trip to Novy Iyerusalim, 1 July 1964**

It was not long before he destroyed us all. He had a colleague at work, a sadist in my opinion, who hated the church and religion so much that he would get hold of icons in order to deface them, burn out their eyes, use a pyx as an ashtray or a rubbish bin and so forth. Near the monastery was a spring and when the old women went there he would pass himself off as an official, go up to them, take away their water carriers and scare them to death. I later found out that when our Lev Lebedev was drunk once, he had boasted to this colleague that regardless of what anyone might think he was going to bring some priests to bless the whole museum, because it was a holy place which had been defiled. This put the colleague on his guard. I had known nothing of all of this.

Several days before the 'misunderstanding', Lev got drunk in my absence, and then brought me some pieces of pottery that were lying about at the museum. I did not really need them, but he suggested I use them at the altar or something. He also gave me several old books. I looked them over. There was no stamp on them, although they were clearly from a museum. However, as there was no stamp, I thought I could accept them. The pieces of pottery were at my home.

Then on the first of July, the festival of the Bogolyubskaya Mother of God, we decided to visit the museum. I had never been to Novy Iyerusalim before. We set off in the parish car. I went with Eshliman and his wife. My wife, Natasha, was in the south with the children. When we arrived, I said to Lev, 'While we are here, you

must not drink a drop. That's it!' While we were strolling around and looking at things, I started talking to his wife. She was Greek by nationality and had very strong antireligious views, but I managed to get through to her and we were soon having our first 'proper' conversation. However, Lev managed to escape and drank two bottles of red wine. He had put into my bag various bits and pieces that we could use to restore the church, a marble circle with holes in it that we could use as a candlestick and a few other things. I was carrying this suitcase with me. However, the atheist colleague, it later turned out, called the police and claimed that some priests had come to steal things and generally cause trouble.

When the police arrived we were sitting in Lebedev's office. One of them came up to us, but the fiery Greek woman threw herself on him. I looked out of the window and saw that everything was getting out of hand in the courtyard. I realised that we had to get out fast! I waved at Eshliman – but there was a sudden commotion. It was Lev Lebedev, drunk, hurling abuse at his colleague. He flung a few blows then fell to the ground; he was hoisted on to a motorcycle by a militiaman and taken to the police station. We all climbed quickly into the car and drove off. At home, I looked at all the things that he had brought me and destroyed them completely – liquidated them as a class. I knew there were going to be immediate consequences.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': the Search, 3 July 1964**

Two days later a squad arrived with a search warrant from the procurator to look for the valuables I had taken from the Novy Iyerusalim museum. The antireligious employee was with the group. He began to look at my library, making mocking comments: 'Oh yes, we thought as much. Haven't we got a slippery one here!' 'Shady character,' I heard them saying to each other. I had various foreign journals and church periodicals. 'Where did you get this from?' he asked in a threatening tone. 'That's published by our church!' I replied. It was *Golos Pravoslaviya (The Voice of Orthodoxy)*. I was most afraid that they would find several things written by our churchwarden that we used to raise money for the restoration of the church. If they were found things would turn out badly for her. The whole situation was very tense. He almost had his hand on them. Then a policeman came over to me and said, 'Listen, give me three roubles and we can sort all this out.' Naturally, I was happy to oblige. The policeman said, 'All these books! When do you have time to serve your parish? You must read all the time.' But the antireligious employee and a young KGB man were still at it. The KGB man said, 'I can't make out what all these books are about.' They took some typewritten extracts from Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* and two icons, claiming that they belonged to the museum. They also took back the old books that I had been given and several pieces of pottery as solid proof that Lebedev had stolen from the museum and given me his loot.

The KGB man was not satisfied. 'We'll send a specialist to look at your library,' he said; and then he sealed my flat. I remained standing on the terrace like an idiot. The antireligious employee said, 'We must discuss things. I will come and see you and we will have a little chat.' 'Come if you have a warrant,' I replied. 'Why are you treating me like this? Who do you think you are?' he said. 'No,' I replied, 'We will talk only when you have your warrant. That is that.'

They left me alone and I decided to finish writing *U vrat molchaniya (At the Gates of Silence)*. I still had three pages to go. 'They won't stop me doing what I planned to do today,' I thought. I went into my Buddhist mode. I was alone at last (as I have already said, my family were away). But my room was sealed. I had some things in

there which my enemies could use against me. Various typewritten things – I don't remember exactly what. Still, I didn't want them to stay there. There was nothing criminal in them, but still. They would take them and not return them. They had not returned my icons or notes, nothing. I began to pace about the church courtyard, lost in thought. Then I decided: I pulled the door open and tore the seals. 'And now I've unsealed it,' I thought, 'I ought to clear up.' So I cleared a few things out and wondered what was going to happen next.

Suddenly my brother appeared. I cheered up and we put our minds together on the matter. They had said that they would return the next day. So I decided to visit one of the administrators in our village, who was a good friend of mine. I told him all about it and he said, 'They came to see us and asked a lot of questions. We said nothing but good about you, that you are in no way antisoviet, and told them they had no right to leave you without finishing off their search.' 'Then I shall go and see them now,' I said.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': the Visit to the KGB**

We got into the car and set off. When we arrived we could not find the headquarters. I asked a policeman, 'Where is the KGB?' He looked at me scornfully as if I were a worm, but pointed out the way all the same. I went in. The place was empty except for a small man sitting there writing something. 'Where is everyone?' I asked him. 'They're out doing their exercises,' he answered – and, indeed, I could see the lads running around outside. I told the small man whom I wanted to see. 'He's out.' 'Then I'll sit down and write a statement. I want to get out of this place. I don't like it.' 'What do you mean, you don't like it?' I wrote out a note and told him to pass it on. I wrote, 'I have been waiting for you for two days. My family has returned, so I request you not to bother me any more.' It later turned out that while I was there he had gone to my house, but I had put locks on all the doors. They went away again. It seemed as though they had somehow lost interest.

### **The 'Lebedev Misunderstanding': Interrogations**

'Lost interest,' indeed! I received a copy of a letter to the procurator. They had decided to turn the incident into a major case. The procurator general, Rudenko himself, had been put on to it and now took charge. I opened a local newspaper and there was an article called 'Fal'shiviy krest' ('The false cross'). It caricatured Lebedev – who was already a caricature anyway – and said that he had invited two priests, Eshliman and Men', who had come to see him with some girls (it was his wife who was described as a girl) and had robbed the museum, sung rowdy songs and God knows what else. I thought, 'What on earth is going to happen next? The answer was an interrogation.

It went on for seven hours and I must say it made an excellent impression on me because the interrogator was from the procurator's office and behaved very well, doing everything correctly. Then a second interrogator arrived. I insisted that I had taken nothing. 'How can you tell that these books came from the museum?' Then it came to light that they had taken my photograph during the search. 'What!' I said angrily. 'You came to see me as representatives of the law. You had no right. Show me where you recorded the fact that you took my photograph!' One of them said to the other, 'Give him the photograph.' There was a lot of toing and froing, but I got the photo. They obviously wanted to use it for a photomontage or to publish it in



some newspaper.

By the time the second interrogation came round, the investigator told me there was no need to worry. And that was indeed the case. They had wanted to kick up a big fuss but God had saved me. They had sent for a top-class expert who had said that these books and all the other things had no distinguishing features, and that their total value was only about 10 or 15 roubles. They all looked very impressive, the books bound in leather, but in fact they were worthless. One day I arrived there, opened the door and saw Lebedev being interrogated. Then Eshliman was searched. They made a thorough job of it, but Eshliman came through it safely. He got off lightly, with the newspaper article. Things turned out worse for me, though.

### **The Affair of the Bribe**

Before this, I had one more adventure. Someone called Lyasunov came to see me. He was in charge of protecting historical monuments. 'A lot of your columns are broken,' he said. 'They've been repaired with cement. You must mend them. Get hold of some white stone and re-do them.' During the fighting in the last war the white stone columns had been hit by shrapnel. There were a lot of them – the whole bell-tower was clad in them. It was the bigger ones, about 15 metres tall, which had been repaired with cement and plaster. What he was asking us to do was a completely impossible task, especially in such a short time. Then I noticed a meaningful expression on his face. 'How much?' I asked him. 'Three,' he said. I gave him the money. He had a colleague with him, from the same organisation. He was sitting in the corner reading Dostoyevsky. I shook their hands and sent them on their way.

It turned out that he had been doing the rounds of eight or ten churches, but he got more and more greedy, and by the eleventh the chap from whom he got the most money – I don't remember who it was – said he would bring the money to him, noted the serial numbers of the banknotes and informed the authorities. They caught him redhanded with the money. The investigation began. They started to drag us all in and his lawyer said that we should all be thrown into prison for bribery.

### **The Holiday, 1964**

I had no idea what would happen next. The holidays were beginning and I felt the need to see the world before I was forced to look at it through a small prison window. So I set off with my wife on a steamer along the Volga. I was feeling pleased because *U vrat molchaniya* was finished, and I was making plans to start studying the Greeks. But when we arrived in Astrakhan' or somewhere a telegram was waiting for me from my colleague Serezha. 'Trushin is here,' it said. 'Come back immediately.' Trushin was plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Affairs. All the way along the Volga I found despairing telegrams in every town we came to. 'Come back urgently.' Leaving Natasha and the bag of books I had brought with me I got on a plane at Saratov and flew home.

### **The End of the Misunderstandings**

And now the rout began. Trushin had arrived asking, 'Where is that criminal they've unmasked in the newspapers?' 'On holiday,' replied Fr Sergi. 'He's not entitled to a holiday!' he said, and left. I went to see him. He did not stand up. 'Well, what are we going to do with you?' He had been in his job since 1945 and had a high rank in the

KGB – colonel or something. Not a pleasant fellow – you would need a long spoon to sup with him. ‘What are we going to do with you?’ ‘Nothing,’ I said. ‘It says here you sang rowdy songs.’ ‘Look,’ I said, ‘I don’t drink, especially in other people’s houses. I don’t know the words of any of those songs.’ ‘Well, you’re not going to be serving as a priest for a while,’ he kept on repeating. Then the phone rang. I guessed that they were phoning him from some institution. ‘He’s denying everything,’ he told them. ‘He says it’s pure moonshine.’ He turned back to me and asked, ‘Which girls were there?’ ‘Look,’ I said, ‘You know how these things get written...’

It was 1964, after all. Khrushchev was in power. Persecution was at full spate. Every issue of *Nauka i religiya* came out with the headline ‘the facts accuse’. Anyone was fair game. All the local and regional newspapers were full of slanders, insinuations and scandal. They were all looking for new facts. ‘That’s it,’ I thought. ‘You’re not going to be serving as a priest for a while,’ he repeated. ‘That’s the end of our “abbey”,’ I thought. Zhenya Barabanov and Sasha Yulikov came to see me – two young men who had just left school. I told them, ‘They’ve closed us down well and truly. But we’ll rely on God’s mercy and wait to see what will happen next.’

And a miracle did indeed take place. Before I had missed even one service the plenipotentiaries had a meeting. Goodness knows what instructions they received, but the diocesan secretary summoned me and said, ‘So they’ve removed you. Well, keep your head down for a month or two. We’ll find you a nice little place, don’t worry, just keep quiet and all will be well. Trushin is a good man,’ I said. ‘It’s the Feast of the Assumption in three days. What am I supposed to do. Not take the service?’ ‘Telephone the plenipotentiary.’

I phoned him and said, ‘Aleksei Alekseyevich, you told me not to serve as priest, but I’m left hanging in the air and it’s the Feast of the Assumption in three days. How will the service take place without me?’ He replied, ‘Well, officiate at the Feast and then look for another parish.’ And there you have it. The whole situation changed.

### **August 1964: the Move to Tarasovka**

I celebrated the service and immediately afterwards got in my car and set off for Tarasovka. The secretary had told me that there was a vacancy there and I went to have a look. The church was very grand and everything seemed to be in order. In the end everything turned out to be considerably worse there, but at that time I had no choice. It was sink or swim. On the day after the service, or the next day, I concluded the agreement. The rout continued in Alabino. They dismissed the churchwarden and broke up the community. The abbey was completely destroyed.

### **The Fate of Lev Lebedev**

Lev Lebedev was also dismissed. He appeared from time to time with his wife, asking what he could do next. He eventually got work with Archbishop Pitirim and wrote articles for the *JMP*. One day he appeared at work completely drunk. Pitirim took fright and dismissed him. Then he went to the Volga, to Pimen Khmelevsky of Saratov. He succeeded in charming him, as he had charmed me, and Pimen ordained him. Eventually he began frequenting low haunts, so Pimen banned him from his diocese. Next I think he took a correspondence course and entered a seminary. At first he was a fanatical supporter of the official hierarchy, and was abusive about Nikolai (Eshliman) and Gleb (Yakunin), but then he fell in with the opposition and

the Old Believers. I met him recently in a monastery. He had long hair, a long flowing beard and a huge skullcap. He was walking along like Archpriest Avvakum with deacon Khaibulin (another original!) and he explained to me how everything was pointless. When I went to serve under Nikodim, he told me that Nikodim was the Antichrist. Later Rozhkov told me that Lev Lebedev had become confessor to his (Rozhkov's) wife, who had already been in psychiatric hospital six times. I went to see him. Lev was lying in a drunken stupor. He opened one eye and suddenly everything came back to me. I do not know what will happen to him. At the moment he is interested in the destructive activities of Masons and Zionists and so on.

### **The Fate of Viktor Fonchenkov**

As regards Fonchenkov, who sent Lev to me, he later managed to get into the theological academy by becoming an external student and teaching there. Then he took holy orders, which proved hard for him: he had not learned how to conduct services. They put him in the foreign department, where he suddenly developed a real psychological disorder: he began to write denunciations of his colleagues, including me on one occasion. He was expelled from the academy and the foreign department and sent to a parish. That, of course, was a great tragedy for him. The whole thing was very surprising because he really had been one of us.

### **The Affair of the Bribe: the End**

I moved to Tarasovka, and there I got a summons to the KGB. So did our unfortunate churchwarden, because they said it was she who had handed over the bribe. I knew that this would kill her – I had a good idea of what would happen to her – so I decided to take it all upon myself. Of course, it was all a lot less pleasant than the interrogation. The whole thing went on and on. We barely escaped going to prison. It was a long investigation. We kept on telling them the same thing: that we had been blackmailed and that we had offered the bribe not out of love of art but because there was nothing else we could do. In the course of all this we managed to do a mutual service. Lyasunov's colleague was afraid that he would be involved too, as the money was to have been shared with him. I said that he had absolutely nothing to do with it and that he had not received any money. When they asked him whether the proposed restoration work was really unrealisable, he said that it was and that the affair had been blackmail. They gave Lyasunov eight years. It turned out that he had received huge sums of money. The procurator said in his speech that Lyasunov was endlessly writing denunciations of his lover and yet continuing to live with her.

### **Discussions about the Letter**

Fr Nikolai Eshliman and others continued to think about writing some kind of letter. We met at my house in Semkhoz. Anatoli Emmanuilovich, Fr Dmitri Dudko, Eshliman and Gleb Yakunin came. Anatoli Emmanuilovich brought a small ten-page draft of a letter to the patriarch saying that everything that had happened was illegal; generally he argued that we must come out against it. Dmitri Dudko and I had a different view and said we would take no action without the participation of a bishop. Nikolai and Gleb were undecided so I suggested that we resolve the question in a conciliar manner [*soborno*]. We decided to summon an extended council [*sobor*].

Ten men gathered at Eshliman's dacha for the discussion. I must make a small

digression here. His parishioners had collected money for Eshliman so that he could buy a dacha in Khimki and move there. I said to my wife, 'Now our friendship will come to an end.' I knew that Nikolai was an unenterprising man and that he didn't like travelling. I knew he would get bogged down there and that we would not have any contact, as I would definitely not visit him in Khimki. And this is what happened. The move to Khimki had a lot of negative consequences for him.

So we all met in Khimki to discuss the question. Everyone was told to speak his mind. We came to the conclusion that we would invite someone older: we were all young. Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov was suggested. Some were in favour, some not; but we decided to invite him, and also Bishop Yermogen.

We still had to work out the text of the letter. Anatoli Vasil'yevich even suggested that the text be read out to the patriarch personally during a service at the Yelokhovskiy cathedral. Someone would come forward, say 'Your Holiness!' and read it out. Bishop Yermogen approved this. So we began to think about what the text should say. I wrote a three-page draft. The general idea was that the 1961 reform contradicted not only church practice but also state law, because the priest was no longer a disenfranchised person. If he was not a full member of his church community, then a paradox arose: he could be elected a member of the local district council but was not eligible to be elected to the church council. My document basically consisted of a series of questions, mostly rhetorical: how to reconcile church practice with the present situation.

Then Fr Gleb said, 'No, this isn't hard-hitting enough for them. We've got to beat it into them so that it gets through to them.' 'Well,' I replied, 'if you don't like it, write it yourself.' I knew that Gleb would never write one line and that Nikolai would write very slowly, terribly slowly, super slowly, and that he would never finish. I was not especially worried.

### **The Search for Solzhenitsyn's Manuscripts**

At that time there was a search on for a novel by Solzhenitsyn, either *The First Circle* or *Cancer Ward*. Solzhenitsyn had a friend, one Teush – he is dead now, God rest his soul – and somehow they found out from him that he had given me some material relating to this novel. He had in fact given me some of his own notes about Solzhenitsyn. I had read them and passed them on to Tolya Rakuzin to read.

So there I was in Semkhoz when I saw a procession of men in suits and ties arriving. I went downstairs. 'We're from the KGB,' they said politely. 'Do you have any weapons?' 'No, of course not!' 'Any antisoviet literature?' 'No, we have nothing of that sort.' 'Good...' They spent eight hours at my house, rummaging about. Then they announced that they also wanted to make a search of the church, so I said, 'I am leaving you here to continue your business. I trust you. You are official people and you will not find what you are looking for.' 'We're looking for Solzhenitsyn's novel,' they said. 'I've never seen it, but look for it by all means. I'll go with some of you to the church.' So we drove to Tarasovka.

When we arrived they behaved very well. 'We don't want to be a nuisance,' they said. 'We'll stop the car here and walk the rest of the way. You can say what you like about who we are.' I made up some rubbish about them having come to see something. I had to let them into all parts of the church. They even wanted to go into the sanctuary. 'Is any of you baptised?' I asked. 'He is.' 'Come on then, I'll take you.' In the sanctuary I kept a box of books and manuscripts. I invited him to look at it. 'I'm not interested in theology,' he said. No, they were not interested in theology. It was

only Solzhenitsyn they were searching for.

We drove back. I got into conversation with them and we even relaxed and laughed. 'Why are you bothered about the old man?' I asked. 'So what if he wrote about the camps. Everyone's doing that nowadays.' One of the men kept on grimly rummaging and rummaging. 'Why don't you look in the rubbish dump?' asked Natasha. 'Don't be sarcastic,' he said. 'This could all end badly for you.' But by the time we got back they had obviously finished and had found nothing. 'No,' I said, 'I don't know anything. I've seen nothing, heard nothing.' And they took nothing away with them. One of them found a diary. It was not my usual practice to keep a diary, but the devil had once tempted me into writing something. This official was polite, though. I saw him reading it with round eyes, but then he hid it again and didn't take it.

They left empty-handed. As they left they said, 'We could have looked downstairs, but we're kind people – we didn't.' And that's where the stuff was. The day before, 30 September, had been my nameday, and we had had a lot of people round. Zhen'ka Barabanov had said to me, 'Things are getting tense, they're arresting people.' So I collected a whole pile of stuff and hid it under the terrace downstairs. The day before! And they hadn't looked there. 'It's a good thing you've been here,' I told them, 'because, first, I can do a bit of tidying up and, second, I now know for sure that I have nothing antisoviet. I have a document stating that you've seen everything here.'

### **I Decline to Participate in Preparing the Letter**

With all these endless adventures I was never able to start composing any kind of letter. So I was not upset when a message came from Anatoli Vasil'yevich saying that we ought to cancel the plan, there was no need to write the letter, that the time was not right. The real meaning of the message, however, was that now Khrushchev had died various changes were on the way and that a letter might only annoy the authorities. This was his opinion. He had discussed the matter with Shkirov and they had decided that the time was not right. It had made sense to send a letter while Khrushchev was alive, but now the task was to try to achieve stability, however minimal.

Yermogen agreed. Gleb met him and then told me about the meeting: 'I was very short with him. I gave him a piece of my mind!' And he carried on with his plan to write the letter with Eshliman. I was not particularly worried: they were both priests, Dudko was a priest, we were all busy with our own affairs, meeting from time to time; they might still have been writing it today, 15 years later. But then there was a fateful development. Feliks Karelin got involved in composing the letter.

### **Feliks Karelin: First Acquaintance**

Feliks was a remarkable person, madly temperamental, passionate; he would take off magnificently, 'talking like a book' for hours. He was a man with a systematic type of intelligence which could have been advantageous to both church and business if it had not been for his unrestrained nature. He first appeared in 1958 or 1959 after he was released from prison at the end of his term (but not rehabilitated). He married an actress who got a job in a theatre in Irkutsk. It was there that he heard about me. I was living in Irkutsk at that time and he tried to find me. From talking to others he had constructed a false notion of me as some kind of visionary or dreamily disposed

person. Finally, Gleb found him and brought him to the parish. As soon as we became acquainted Karelin took me into a separate room and began straight away to tell me about how he had been in solitary confinement and how in that unpleasant place he had for some reason drawn a six-pointed star on the wall and had started to meditate on it. Whole systems of creation had constructed themselves within him, systems of redemption – a whole lot of things. I looked upon him with such sadness, as if he were a madman, that he soon stopped telling me about these convoluted notions.

But Gleb was totally seized by him and in Moscow he was greeted with a wave of rapture. He made up narratives interpreting the book of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Everyone went into complete ecstasy; but after a month or so they would refuse to let him into their homes. This happened with Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov and many others. He would make a totally positive impression at first, and then become totally repulsive. He wanted to be ordained. Since he had not been rehabilitated he could not live in Moscow, so he travelled from city to city. He lived in Tashkent for a long time. All the archbishops would welcome him with open arms, but then send him on his way.

### **Feliks Karelin: His Previous History**

One day, Feliks brought a chap called Leva – Natanson I think his name was – along with him. This Leva wanted to be baptised. I got to know him, and one day, about a week later, he came to see me by himself. We went walking in the wood near the church and he told me the story of his life. Then he told me something astonishing about Feliks: that he had been a state provocateur instructed to mix with a group of young people who met after the war to discuss religious and philosophical themes. They were seeking God. The head of this group was a fellow named Kuz'ma, who is dead now. One of them was Il'ya Shmayen, who has since emigrated to Israel. Feliks Karelin (the son of a well-known secret police officer who was shot) went into the army at the end of the war and was recruited to SMERSH. In order to atone for the sins of his father he was forced to work as an agent. He was sent to Kuz'ma's group. But as he was a very passionate and temperamental person, he was, of course, not suited to SMERSH. He quickly became attracted to the religious and philosophical ideas the young men were studying. It must be remembered that there were no books or anything in the postwar period, so we thought up everything ourselves. Feliks had a kind of religious conversion and he told the young men that he had come to them by order of 'party and government'. There were embraces, tears and so on and then everyone was arrested and imprisoned – the young men and Feliks too.

In the camps, the same camps that are described in *Moi vospominaniya* (*My Memoirs*), he had a broad education. He used to tell me about his long, detailed conversations with Catholic prelates, with former SS men, with Jewish and Latvian nationalists and with professors of Russian literature. As a very talented person who was able to grasp ideas quickly, he learned much and was, I would say, quite an educated man. He was about six years older than me, born about 1929. Once, in the camp, he led a semi-fascist organisation and announced that he was a German. His mother is in fact half-German, but the rest of him is Jewish. He then experienced a conversion to Christianity, to Orthodoxy, and was baptised.

Before the baptism took place, something quite unpleasant happened to him. He was always giving lectures, discussing and sharing his ideas. He could do this. He learned the knack in the camp. But many believed he was a provocateur, so when

they uncovered a genuine provocateur, it was decided that Feliks should kill him – thus proving that he was not an informer himself. The murder had to be committed with a knife. This was terrible because it is very hard for a nonexpert to kill with a knife. It is much easier with an axe. But Feliks had to do it with a knife. It was a very cruel sentence, but as Natanson said, Feliks had no choice. Either he killed this man, or he would be killed. He killed the provocateur and they gave him a second chance. After this he was baptised, by a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, I think. He then formed some group or other, but it was exposed. According to Natanson – I know nothing of this myself – Feliks was a kind of Stavrogin figure who led all those young men astray and destroyed them all.

Hearing all this presented me with an immediate problem: if Feliks had come to me as a provocateur, why then had he brought this Leva Natanson, who had told me all this, to see me? He was obviously completely sincere – unless he thought that Leva would not say anything. If that were the case, had he not even warned him? After a while, I came straight out with it and told Feliks, 'Leva has told me about your... rich past.' He said, 'Well, you must understand that I couldn't tell you all of that straight away. Think about it – could I have come to you and said, "I am a former informer and a murderer"?' And of course he was quite right. If someone had come and denounced himself to me like that, then despite all my 'liberalism', I would, of course, have accepted him, but with the greatest difficulty, I confess. It would have involved the greatest of efforts and it would have been difficult to erase the doubts stirring in my mind. So he convinced me; it was after all what I thought too.

Later I heard a lot about Karelin and his prophecies from those who had been in the camps with him. He had worked out when the end of the world would be from the Book of Daniel. He was a talented man and for ill-informed people his talents were staggering. I remember how one of the people I had studied with came to me and requested that Feliks tell me the whole story himself. My friend was astounded by Karelin's calculations: his mouth opened wide. I confess that I didn't believe any of it, because I know that the Book of Daniel and the Apocalypse are quite different things, so all this biblical alchemy didn't impress me at all. But Gleb was simply enraptured. Eshliman could not stand him. But Feliks turned out to play a fateful role. Eshliman and Yakunin were still planning to write the letter, but neither of them could get it done, so they asked Feliks. What happened subsequently fully convinced me that all suspicion regarding his dishonesty was misplaced: he was completely honest.

### **The First Reaction to the Letter**

They took the letter to Bishop Aleksii of Tallin (now Patriarch Aleksii II–Ed.), who was chancellor of the Russian Orthodox Church. According to them, tears stood in his eyes as he accepted the document from them. For some reason they thought the letter was going to make a good impression, although they suspected that there would also be repressive measures. I thought the authorities would suspend them as priests as soon as they had read the document, and told them so. On the day of the presentation I met Karelin and he said to me solemnly, 'It has begun!' I was gloomy and said to him that it was a great shame if two such people should fall from our ranks, to which he answered like Caiaphas, 'What do two people matter in the context of this great business!' The letter was presented officially to the church. A second letter – more effectively worded in my view – was sent to the government.

What went on in the highest church circles I cannot say. The old patriarch reacted in a contradictory manner. To begin with he said, 'So there are some good people after all!' One prominent churchman, at that time on a foreign trip, said when he read the letter 'Well, life is worth living now!' But on the other hand, the patriarch also said, 'They want to make me quarrel with the authorities.' He was not actually interested in these two priests. It would never occur even to an ordinary bishop to call in two priests for a conversation; much less so to the patriarch. Eshliman and Yakunin carried on with their lives. Meanwhile, the document was being read at the highest levels; it was published abroad; it was broadcast on the BBC. Three months passed by.

### **The Reading of the Letter at Anatoli Vedernikov's**

Not long after the presentation of the document Karelin and the two priests visited Anatoli Vasil'yevich Vedernikov at home to read the letter. They had been reading it aloud in raptures to their friends. Not being used to their own written productions, they were very satisfied not just with the fact of the letter, but also with its form. I hope I may be forgiven for a somewhat comic representation of the situation, because tragedy was imminent, but the comic thing was that they would read the whole thing out loud even though it was 70 typewritten pages long. I was often present as an exercise in patience, and would listen to it through to the end though I already knew it off by heart. On one occasion I went with Fr Sergi Zhedludkov to Fr Nikolai Eshliman's where he began to read out the whole text to him as though he were illiterate. Zheludkov sat there, but he was not listening, as he subsequently confessed to me. He was deciding something else at the time: whether or not to sign it. He imagined that they would invite him to sign the document, so he let it all pass over his head, all the while locked in an internal struggle under the devouring looks of a St Bernard dog who was sitting there. No, those readings were impossible.

Then they did the same thing to Anatoli Vasil'yevich. I think he was somewhat insulted that they were reading a document of such length out loud to him and towards the end of the reading I felt that it had all reached its limit. I knew that there was going to be an explosion. But it was late, I had to travel to my home out of town, so I said 'arrivederci' to everyone and left. They later told me that when the reading finished the pallid listeners sprang up and the slaughter began. 'What arrogance!' They shouted at Karelin. Karelin shouted back. There was an ungracious and senseless altercation.

The letter provoked a huge response among ordinary clergy. I was studying at evening classes at the time, and priests used to come from far-flung corners of the country. Many of them had heard about the letter on the radio, had collected money for the two priests and were generally inspired by their action. This attitude changed later when their dissident position became clear. I used the word 'dissident' even then although it was not used about politics at that time. I used it in a legal sense, because 'dissidents' were church dissenters, a church opposition and not at all political.

I told them that a dissident position would not bring about the required results, but nevertheless they continued to consider me one of them and invited me to church festival celebrations. Of course, Feliks was heavily involved. Everyone was endlessly making predictions, saying that the Orthodox world would soon be rising up, and it was said that Patriarch Kirill of Bulgaria had asked our Kuroyedov, at some lunch or other, 'What's all this disorder, with people writing letters like this?' However,



everything came to an end. They received sympathetic letters from abroad, from private individuals, some of whom helped by sending them money, but their position was, without a doubt, a fringe one.

### **The Patriarch Suspends the Authors of the Letter**

No substantial support in fact materialised. The excitement subsided. The critical moment was arriving. I thought it important that they should protect themselves and entreated them to make every effort to stay in their parishes. Yes, the letter was the letter, they will go down in history, they had performed an honourable action. The main thing was, though, that they should continue to serve the church. But their 'dissidence' was beginning to affect them, each for different reasons. Feliks Karelin was simply an extremist, a fantastical man – he got carried away. Gleb was sincere and ardent. As for Nikolai Nikolayevich, he was a stubborn individual, who having taken up a position could not back down from it. He would just say, 'That's how it is'. He was an authoritarian and could not admit his own mistakes. I do not say this in judgment on him. This was all long ago. I am just putting it down for the record.

Pimen summoned them and invited them to write a note clarifying three points. The first point, if I am not mistaken, was whether or not they had changed their views; the second point was what they were going to do next; and the third point was whether they were going to apologise to the bishops for insulting them, or something of that kind. It was quite clear to me that they should sit down and write a polite letter saying that they certainly had not meant to insult anyone, that they had written from the position of both churchmen and citizens, and that it had been more in the line of an inquiry than a denunciation (although in fact it was decidedly denunciatory in tone, with a total of at least a page of quotations from the prophet Ezekiel; moreover, it began 'We write as the lowliest sons of the most holy patriarch...' and then these sons went on to inform him what was written in the Scriptures, and so on). But they did not do this, going instead to Feliks, who, I suppose, dictated or inspired a sharp answer saying that their views had not changed and that everything was exactly the same. It was even written in a somewhat accusing tone. The next day they were temporarily suspended as priests.

### **The Synod Suspends the Authors of the Letter**

They answered, accusing the patriarchate of suspending them unlawfully. So then not just the patriarch but the whole synod assembled and suspended them with the full force of a synodal decree. Moreover, friends of mine told me later, the members of synod who signed the decree had never met either Eshliman or Yakunin, they knew nothing about the details of the affair and were in my opinion not even interested. One of these archbishops (deceased now, I think) was travelling with a friend of mine in a car, when someone said to him, 'What you signed ruined two young fellows. They're young and hotheaded after all. All that was needed was to talk to them.' 'Yes, yes,' he replied, 'but, well, you know...' No one except Pimen ever saw them face to face. When he first summoned Eshliman, Pimen said to him, 'This is how you thank me, Nikolai Nikolayevich!' You see, he had helped a lot in getting him ordained. He had done everything in his power to get him to Moscow. Nikolai answered, 'I had no intention of criticising you personally, but I had to speak out,' to which Pimen answered with words to the effect that 'sticks and stones may break my bones...' And thus they parted.

### **The Attempt at Reconciliation through Metropolitan Nikodim**

After a time I noticed that western propaganda had forgotten about them, that church circles at home had gradually distanced themselves from them and that in general nothing had been gained. I felt very sorry that they were lost for the church. Therefore I went at my own risk to Metropolitan Nikodim, knowing him to be the only person capable of conducting a dialogue, and I said to him, '*Vladyka*, I know these people. They are good men and they spoke out honourably and sincerely. I believe it is in your interests, as chairman of the Department of Foreign Relations, to bring this incident to an end, but I believe it is impossible to do so other than by personal contact. Politics shows that personal contact does more than any number of letters of mutual denunciation. Will you agree to meet them?' He said, 'I will meet them with pleasure!' 'Your Grace,' I said, 'I did not tell them that I was coming to you. I came at my own risk, because if I had told them then they might have protested, so I will tell them now.'

I went to see them with another priest, an acquaintance of mine. They were at a meeting – they were continuously having meetings with Kapitanchuk, Regel'son and others. 'The patriarchate in the person of Metropolitan Nikodim would like to talk to you,' I told them. 'I have been to see him.' 'Why did you do that?' they asked. 'We have nothing to talk to them about. We don't want anything to do with those people or talk to them at all.' I said, 'It won't hurt. Go and talk. You've never had any kind of dialogue with anyone. That's not right. They may be villains and scoundrels, but you're all human beings. Go and... ' 'No! There's no point. We won't talk to them. It'll just be irrelevant rubbish.' I was now in a foolish position, of course. I went back and said, '*Vladyka*, they don't want to talk. I wanted them to, of course, but they don't. There is nothing to be done.' He started talking to me. 'I want to be patriarch as I am the only one who is capable of doing the job. And they... if they think they're the only ones with principles they're mistaken. I came from an unbelieving party family. I was converted and entered the church, but we cannot have a situation in which the state and its laws are contradicted by the church.' 'Of course we cannot,' I said, 'but no one is demanding that. We are talking about how to harmonise the laws of church and state.' He ignored this. He was saying that there had to be a full agreement. I didn't deny this, I still don't. If there is a state, it has laws and whatever they may be you have to take account of them. There's no doubt about that.

Afterwards, when various officials would talk to me about 'those villains' Eshliman and Yakunin, I would reply that the villains were those who provoked them to write the letter. Those officials in the regional committees and other establishments that had closed churches on Khrushchev's instructions – they had created the situation which had given birth to the letter. They were the guilty party. The guilty are not those who protest against violations, but the violators.

### **The Departure of Karelin's Group from the Patriarchal Church**

The situation continued to stagnate as the group became more and more negative about the Russian Orthodox Church. They began referring to the patriarch by his surname only (Simansky); and on the basis of the theory that Metropolitan Sergi had been unlawfully appointed, they said that Patriarch Aleksii was unlawful too. In fact, the whole thing had nothing to do with the concept of legality. The legality of any given patriarch has no connection with that of any other. There was a Church Council (*Sobor*), and that is that. There are no canonical guidelines on how to elect a

patriarch so no one can lay claim to lawfulness or unlawfulness. We recognised the patriarch; but the group moved over to the Georgian Church and associated themselves with the Georgian patriarch. He responded positively to them and gave them some money. It was all the same to him, he was an old man. It seems to me that there is no church or state legality in Georgia – complete arbitrariness. The group liked Georgia; they travelled there frequently and found places to live.

### **The Attempt to Organise Theological Courses**

They were in a state of zeal all the time, talking incessantly, firing one another up so that they all reached a state of incandescence: 'Now it's really starting, now it's coming to a head.' In this kind of context apocalyptic tendencies develop quickly and Karelin, whose whole life was lived in an apocalyptic fervour, was completely seized. They started meditating together on the Book of Daniel and on the Apocalypse, in the style of Feliks when he first appeared in Moscow. The atmosphere was tense and unhealthy. I was afraid they were going to tear themselves apart spiritually, so I made a suggestion to involve them and some of my young parishioners too: 'You get together to talk and drink, but we all have a great need. Everyone is coming up with theological interpretations, but everyone is terribly ignorant about theology, including you. So let's begin actually studying theology.' Ignorance of any kind always repels me – people who start on a subject but don't know what they are talking about.

Good! Excellent! They took to the idea with enthusiasm. We all met in a little room near the church in Khamovniki: some of my young parishioners, the two priests and Karelin. Karelin delivered a formal speech which made me feel sick: this was the opening of a private spiritual academy of which I was to be the rector. I barely got through the occasion and never crossed the threshold of that room again, pleading being busy as my excuse. I simply could not bear it any more: my soul would not accept it. They showed me a plan of their activities for me to approve. Judging by the titles it seemed to bear some resemblance to theology. They began to study and read.

Feliks, a very gifted and talented person, grasped everything quickly. From snatches of what he read he constructed something of his own, a peculiar, oversimplified, paranoid, apocalyptic theology. There were some interesting elements in it but the whole thing was a synthesis of ill-assorted bits. There was something distressing and unpleasant about it all. Then I suddenly began realising that my parishioners were saying stupid obscurantist things. 'Where did you get that idea?' I would ask. 'Well, we came up with it at our meeting.' I will not name any names because they are all good people. Let them talk for themselves.

The situation deteriorated so much that eventually I had to say something. I told them that it was all complete nonsense. One thing particularly offended me. They made copies of some religious book – I don't remember now which one, but it was quite harmless – and suddenly one of the lads told me, 'It's been turned down by the censor.' 'What do you mean? What censor?' I asked. It turned out that the academy had already produced a censor. Karelin had said that the book was not allowed. A kind of inquisition started up. It was all turning in the direction of pathological fanaticism.

### **The 'Demographic Explosion' in the Parish**

I stopped going to see them. I was very busy in a new parish with a large population.

It was at this time – 1964 to 1966 – that I experienced my first demographic explosion. I had no kind of retreat where I could talk to people, so I had to walk the streets and talk to them there. It was terribly difficult. More and more people started appearing and I didn't want to erect barriers of any kind. What is more, the new people were of all kinds: some were good to have, but I could have done without some of the strange ones. It was then, I think, that Mikhail Agursky appeared. Gennadi Shimanov and seven young women came. He asked me whether I was a Catholic. He said I was untrustworthy. For my part, I adopted a joking tone with him and didn't give him any answers, because he made a strange impression on me. There were many such interesting meetings at that time.

### The 'Open Day' at Semkhoz

I had less and less to do with Karelin's group. There were a great many interesting and remarkable people around at that time. I was fully occupied writing my book *Dionis, logos i sud'ba* and reworking my book *Magizm*. On Wednesdays people met at my home. In order to avoid an overflow, I made the whole of Wednesday a kind of open day and some 25 to 30 people would come. I would get completely worn out and feel I could not talk to another person, but they would keep coming. A lot of them were people who really needed to come and that was good, but others were there just out of idle curiosity, and people sometimes brought complete outsiders. I would shudder as the curtain parted – I had no office and was in the annex – to let in yet more completely unknown individuals from goodness knows where who would sit down and ask me any old questions. At least they were easy for me to answer.

Quite quickly, after a couple of years, I found I could no longer cope with all this and I put a stop to the 'open days'. Subsequently, I received retribution for these 'Wednesdays' when an emigre wrote an article 'Fr Aleksandr Men' in which he described these 'at homes'. They were not 'at homes', but I said I was at home one day only so that people did not come every day. And then I simply raised the bridges over the fence, that's all.

### Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

It was at that time that I became acquainted with 'Kostya'. This is how it happened. I read the manuscript of one of his books and found it very satisfying. I was with another priest on holiday on an island and he read it too. We decided to go and see the author. One of our colleagues knew him and promised a meeting: Dudko did the negotiating. We went by car – the colleague, Dudko and I. When we arrived a guard challenged us: 'Who's there?' Our colleague shouted, 'We've got an appointment.' The guard was completely disconnected, but finally let us in and we stood looking at one another with distrust and surprise. Then Kostya appeared. From photographs I had expected to see a gloomy, emaciated wolf, but here was a jolly, energetic, choleric and very clever Norwegian skipper with huge teeth, a jokey person radiating mental energy and intelligence. I had occasion to meet various writers – Dudintsev and others – but none of them gave me the impression of being intelligent. Many of them were more interesting in what they wrote. But this one was an interesting person in himself. He grasped things quickly with easy understanding. There was something boyish about him and he loved to construct fantastic plans. Many of his ideas had a charming primitiveness about them: he would take some concept and immediately set about it with a metaphorical axe. We had a very lively conversation from

which I could see that he had a very clear idea about what themes interested him. I am not criticising: I think this is a good thing. He could let everything go over his head indifferently, but when he heard words which were call signs for him he would instantly come alive. When Dudko said he had been in a camp, he sat up immediately and noted all the details down in a notebook.

Rumours subsequently went round Moscow that he was my parishioner, even my spiritual son. Someone said so to me only yesterday. This idea is completely false. When I got to know him, in 1966 or 1967, he could not even call himself a Christian. More than anything else he was a Tolstoyan; he viewed Christianity as a kind of ethical system. At that time he read some of my books, including *Otkuda yavilos' vse eto?* (*Where Did All This Come From?*) which was basically a book of photographs. He liked it, but on the theme 'Heaven on Earth' his comment was 'This is all impossible, all these angels.' Everything to do with the church was still quite alien to him and I had to talk to him about symbolism and suchlike.

Then he had the idea of building a church: he was due to receive payment for some of his writing and said that it should be used to build a church. I chuckled, but he was serious and his first wife came over and we drove around the region in my car. We chose a very beautiful place near Zvenigorod: 'Here will the town's foundation be laid to spite our haughty neighbour'. I was captivated by all this – the conviction that what he wanted would come about. On the whole people who strive with such determination to achieve their aims do achieve them. Sometimes I really thought that something was soon going to be standing on that spot. As a prophet he simply saw all of this very clearly and it seemed to him that everything was 'in the bag'. We had already measured the area up. I was ready. Well. ...

He asked me to find him an architect and I found someone who had started producing terrible and fantastical designs. I chose him in order to give him moral support, but he later emigrated and met a sad end. He produced a draft design for the church which was a schizophrenic nightmare. 'It's brilliant, it's the heart of all the world, it's the pain of all the world!' he said, forcing it under my nose. I felt like one of the martyrs and consoled myself with the thought that at least some of my sins would be forgiven.

After this first 'act for the church' of Kostya's I wrote to him, begging him not to carry on with it. I told him that he did not understand the church situation at all and that he would only commit blunders. He had one particular trait in common with many exceptional people. In a situation where he knew what he was doing he was brilliant but in other situations he always made a mess of things. This not at all surprising: it was the same with Tolstoy. I understand this kind of stormy personality which recognises no barriers but goes serenely ahead without batting an eyelid even when it is creating havoc.

### **Kalik's Film**

Once I was in a film. It was called *Lyubite*, by the director Kalik, who has now emigrated, and was about love. The scenes were interspersed with dialogues filmed on the streets or in people's homes, revealing what different kinds of people thought about love: young people in dance halls, journalists drinking vodka, professors, students and workers on the factory floor. Kalik had the idea of asking a priest. The film crew came to my church. 'As an exception,' they said, 'we'll shoot it all with a hidden camera and you'll talk, looking straight at the camera'.

They came several days later and wired up the whole huge building. I answered

their questions for 45 minutes. Of course, they forgot about love and asked me about everything under the sun. I had foreseen that this would happen and made use of the occasion. Later I was invited to the Gor'ky studios to watch the film. It was interesting how my part had turned out – I noticed all the defects. The footage of me was included in the film in the normal way. But then they said to Kalik, 'The priest came out best of all. You'll have to cut him out.'

In the end the film did not reach the big screen: it was used for private showings only. When it was shown at my brother's workplace Kalik introduced it. 'There are seven "turbulent priests" in Moscow,' he said, 'and I've got one of them talking on this film.' Where he got the number seven from I do not know – it is rubbish – and why I am a 'turbulent priest' I am not clear.

They had not asked only about love. 'Don't tell me the questions in advance,' I told them. 'Let me have them all as they come up, so that I don't have a chance to think up answers in advance.' 'Why are moral standards falling nowadays?' they asked me. 'Do you think things were any better before?' I replied, 'I wasn't alive before the revolution, so I don't know. But if you do think things were better before, then my answer to you is, if it is so, then the decline is spiritual.' I went on to explain what I meant. They asked me all kinds of questions, even provocative ones but it was obvious that this was all done without any evil intention; they simply wanted to know. I answered all their questions. That was what killed the film.

### **The Film about Sport**

When this film failed, some other people made a film about sport. It was a wide-screen colour film. They came to me too. This time I was filmed full-length, standing against the church as background, and I talked about sport. They told me that I had come across even better than before. So they took me out of it completely. The footage with me on was probably burnt.

### **Publication of the Book *Syn chelovechesky***

At this period I was intensively involved in teaching Hebrew, and in translating parts of the prophets in preparation for writing a book on them. I was busy with many other different things at the same time. My work was first published in 1968 – although my translation of François de Sales came out in 1958. It happened like this. It was in Siberia in 1955 that I found a book by François de Sales published in 1818. I liked it very much and decided to make it available to the reading public. On my return to Moscow I found a French original and my aunt did a translation. We distributed it and it eventually found its way to the publishing house *La Vie avec Dieu* (*Zhizn s bogom*), who published it with a foreword by one of our Moscow people. But it was in 1968 that I held in my hands, for the first time, my book *Syn chelovechesky*. I could not believe my eyes. It was published anonymously, under a pseudonym which the publishers had thought up for themselves. Just at that time two crises happened. The first was that the incumbent priest at our church, my superior, wrote some monstrously harmful denunciations of me. The second was a crisis in the Eshliman–Karelin group. Again I was convinced that Karelin was acting in all sincerity.

### **Christmas 1966**

Generally, I had felt that a break with this group was inevitable – a break with

people who were simply leading our young men astray. We were invited to visit them at Christmas 1965 or 1966. Regel'son and Kapitanchuk were there too. They welcomed us festively and asked us how we liked the decorations they were hanging up. All this was foolish child's play. Later, at the table, Feliks delivered a sermon – yes, a sermon – on a moral theme, but it was quite incompatible with his own situation in life. It came across not only as artificial, but false as well. Everyone was wearing paper hats and it struck me how we were all sitting there like dupes. Of course I refused to be dragged in, but the poor friend I had come with – also a priest – was not so lucky. Eventually I just left.

### **Conversation with Regel'son**

A few days later I had a conversation with Regel'son. 'We belong to different churches,' he said. I answered that there is only one church and that Feliks would be the ruin of them. He had been sent by either the KGB or the devil – I still could not tell precisely which. Well, of course Regel'son was quite infuriated. On top of all that a woman had said she thought she had seen Karelin somewhere, in one of those places where people ought not to be seen – in some reception room in the Lubyanka or somewhere. This turned out to be a myth. I had taken it as a myth but I told Regel'son about it as an example of the kind of thing people were saying. It was clear that this was Satan at work through the hands of enemies. This kind of absurd situation could not have developed otherwise.

### **Conversation with Karelin**

On another occasion, Feliks came to see me to try to sort out our relationship. It was night-time. We walked around the church after the service, and I teased him. A dog was running around us in circles and I told him that it was Mephistopheles who once ran around Faust in the form of a poodle. He crossed himself feverishly and glanced about. I told him that he had brought great evil upon us, that he had done serious damage to our parish and that he had brought confusion into the minds of our young people. He said that I did not trust him: he had confessed to me but I had betrayed him by ceasing to trust him. I was silent. I did not want to tell him that someone who had been working as an agent for years and who had been a murderer and a provocateur hardly has a claim on anyone's trust. There was good reason for us always to suspect him of something; although I had never in fact doubted his honesty.

### **The Break with Karelin**

I was convinced of Karelin's honesty by what eventually happened. I broke with him completely in the 1960s. I gave my friends a choice: either go with him or stay with our parish. Two stayed with him: Kapitanchuk and Lev Regel'son. All the rest left him and made haste to rejoin our parish. Naturally Gleb Yakunin and Nikolai Eshliman stayed with him. I continued to maintain a relationship with them, but they rarely came to see me and our relationship grew colder and colder. In 1967 Nikolai spoke to me at Gleb's wedding or some other event, and he said, 'Feliks is a man of God sent from on high.' But three months later he visited me and said, 'He is Satan and I have broken with him.'

### **The Story of the End of the World**

In 1968 events finally convinced me of his honesty. A group consisting of Nikolai,

Gleb, Feliks, Kapitanchuk, Lev Regel'son and someone else, I do not remember who, were always at Nikolai's house, having animated discussions, drinking, dreaming. They were living a myth, completely divorced from reality. This was how all the business with the letter had happened. They were operating in an imaginary situation. They were listening to western radio, which encouraged their fantasies: there were going to be great upheavals, a schism, the whole world of Orthodoxy... It was at that time that I had to persuade them to talk to the patriarch through Nikodim, but nothing came of it, as I have already said. The break was complete. I was fully engrossed in my parish work and my writing.

One day Feliks and Gleb were walking along the road to somewhere when they had a vision that the end of the world was coming and that that very year there would be signs described in the apocalypse – earthquakes and so on. They started trying to convince people. Lev Regel'son went around the homes of his acquaintances and explained persistently that the end of the world was nigh – or at least, the destruction of Moscow. I lent no credence to any of this and went to Lake Seliger.

Everyone hurried to leave Moscow, selling their belongings and moving to Novy Afon (New Athos). There was a myth around Novy Afon that it was a holy place, beyond the reach of turpitude. Feliks revealed himself completely: this was why Eshliman broke with him. When I returned to Moscow, I realised with horror that all this commotion was going on in our ranks. This was what convinced me of the sincerity of it all, as Feliks exposed himself completely. One priest arrived in Novy Afon having thrown over his parish without any explanation. He was suspended. There were difficult experiences for all these people. Nothing came of it. Later, I said to Gleb, 'Do you understand that it was all an illusion?' But he was persistent – somehow he wanted to believe it all. Man is a weak creature. Only gradually did he lose interest in all this.

Later they said that they had not indicated an exact time, but other people told me that they had given not just a time, but the date as well. They were expecting dramatic events which would lead to mass baptism. They took sacks of crosses with them in order to baptise a crowd of panicking people – but what is the value of baptism through fear? This kind of thing is still going on. A certain Zaitsev is terrorising people in the same way and has persuaded a large number to be baptised out of fear of terrible events to come in which the unbaptised will perish.

### **The Fate of Eshliman**

Eshliman broke with all this completely. It was too great a catastrophe for him, however: he did not recover. I tried to support him but he began to undergo an astonishing transformation. He changed so much spiritually that he became a quite different person. Never in my life have I witnessed this kind of metamorphosis of an individual. All the layers of his spirituality – which was remarkable, imbued with mysticism – were washed away completely, and a highly primitive, primordial layer came to light. We had been quite close friends before, but now we suddenly became alien to one another, not only not understanding one another, but also not able to talk about anything.

I remember the moment when I realised this. I was at Afon, having followed everyone else there to find out what was going on. He had been invited there, too. He had arrived earlier and met us joyfully. I thought, 'Perhaps now we will find a common language and come together again.' But instead he spent his time drinking Kavkaz, a dry wine. He sat there talking – it was all very difficult. Then one day we



sat together on the bank of a river and he was silent. I knew then that we were divided by an impassable chasm.

He suffered from fits of depression – real, heavy depression which he chased away by getting drunk. I organised doctors for him, and they said his symptoms showed he was suffering from a tubercular type of intoxication which affects the nervous system, but this was only a hypothesis. He was always in and out of hospital.

He told me then that all his ideas about Feliks as a man of God had proved illusory – but he didn't have that open Russian soul which is capable of repenting! He was an aristocratic person. It was terrible for him. He didn't want to meet me or any of our church friends. His character wouldn't allow it. He could only be either on the horse or off it. This was the worst collapse of a human being I have ever seen in my life. I called him, I wrote to him repeatedly. When I learned that he had left his home and found himself another family I wrote to him, 'Is it going to stop here? Your personal affairs can change nothing in our relationship.' But no!

Many years later, at the farewell gathering for Anatoli Emmanuilovich Krasnov, we met again. I gave him a piece of my mind. 'I'll definitely come and see you,' he said. 'Definitely.' It is many years since Krasnov emigrated now. I have heard rumours that Eshliman is in hospital. It's unpleasant and difficult for him to see his church friends. Church themes grate on him. An unusually gifted priest suffered a terrible blow which completely knocked him off his feet – completely. I believe that Feliks was largely responsible. He created an atmosphere of hysterics and Nikolai had a leaning towards exultation. I knew that he would not come through. It was wrong to live every day in expectation of the end of the world, waiting for signs and wonders.

### **The Fate of Lev Regel'son**

Feliks was left with Kapitanchuk and Regel'son. Then, in turn, he quarrelled with them too and found himself on his own. As far as I know, he has now joined the neo-Slavophiles and has become a genuine Russian. But no one has seen him except for his occasional appearances at the Church of Il'ya Obydenny. He has grown a long grey beard. Regel'son came to see me at church. I didn't remind him of our conversation about our belonging to different churches. I told him that our church was open. Of course I didn't want him to return to our parish so I didn't give him any hints about that. I didn't want that because I saw that it would be pointless. Ever since I had baptised him he had concocted his own notions and followed his own ideas. That was bad. He never listened properly or read anything thoroughly. That way you never learn anything.

### **Some Conclusions**

Several conclusions can be drawn from this story of an attempt to form a church opposition. The first conclusion is that opposition is possible only when there is something to lean on. That is, there must be the right conditions for it. Our activists had nothing to lean on. I believe that they should have worked patiently and persistently to bring about these conditions, and if these were only internal conditions, then so be it. There was only a very thin layer of active priests and laymen. You could count the active priests on your fingers – and now there are even fewer of them. There were only a dozen of them then. Work should have been done to increase their number, by pricking people's consciences. I am not saying I am opposed to this kind

of activity – no. I simply considered that it was too soon. Nothing had been done to make it possible for them to take effective action. I have always prized courage in people but I have always been worried by chickens which cackle loudly but produce only one small egg. It was all too early. In history 10 or 15 years are nothing. Church life was broken down and destroyed over decades; for centuries all kinds of distortions had been introduced into it. In order to bring about rebirth what was needed was cooperative, persistent, patient and peaceful work at local level in the parishes and among the people – Christian labour.

If it was absolutely necessary to make some sort of statement then it ought to have been while Khrushchev was still in power. Afterwards it was no longer necessary. If there was to be a struggle then it should have been dummies who engaged in it. By ‘dummies’ I don’t mean fictitious people but people who were not suited to anything else. If only Eshliman had not signed the letter, but a certain Ivanov instead, who would simply have lent his signature and agreement to the content of the letter and borne the responsibility for the whole business. It was not even Eshliman who wrote the letter, but Feliks. These Ivanovs would not have been imprisoned. They would have suffered a certain amount of unpleasantness – even assuming they had to be priests who signed it. But a man like Eshliman, who could have done so much for the church, was blown out of the saddle. I saw the whole thing as the activity of Satan, destroying the work we were just starting.

### **The Move to Novaya Derevnnya**

I have already mentioned that a lengthy denunciation was written against me; but our metropolitan Pimen (who is now patriarch) agreed to transfer me. I wrote to tell him that the information was pure slander and asked him to transfer me from there ‘in view of the development of an unbrotherly relationship with my superior’. I wrote that I had never done any harm to my superior and that I did not know what had prompted him to write these things. In his denunciation he wrote that he had no problems as far as my conduct of services was concerned, but that it was the conversations I had with people, the books I read and gave to others to read and so on.

There is an interesting story to do with my superior priest. His children had left the church completely. They were adults – remarkable lads. One Lent he persuaded them to come to church and make their confession. I began to ‘work on’ them, and later on his nephew too. They began to attend church and treat their father’s profession with respect. Naturally I gave them books. Then their father took fright. He forbade them to associate with me, so everything went back to how it had been before.

When everyone at church realised that I was moving, they got together a petition and wrote to Pimen saying that they did not want me to go, so he had to send a telegram to the parish saying that he would not transfer me after all. Everyone calmed down. I was in a very difficult position as it was very difficult for me to serve with my superior at the altar. We were not even speaking to each other. It was all quite unpleasant. I had to serve with him for nearly a year under these conditions.

Then Fr Grigori brought me here, making a special journey to Semkhoz to fetch me. It had in fact been my dream to move here. When he had been ill from time to time he had asked me to come over from Tarasovka to do his services. When I transferred myself to his parish I did so secretly and didn’t tell anyone. My superior was very upset. He didn’t want me to go. He simply wanted me to stop doing anything that was not permitted – otherwise I satisfied him 100 per cent. I was summoned to the administrative office of the diocese and we met there. I told him that it was

goodbye. 'What?' he exclaimed. 'The order has already been issued,' I told him.

So I was transferred to Novaya Derevnaya and am already fully occupied with work. I have stopped travelling about, I have stopped going to Moscow and have begun to sever all my links. Many of my friends have gone in the big wave of emigration. It is all in the past now: the talking, the night walks, apostolic journeys around Moscow. I can see now that it all produced very little, except weariness. God himself sends the people who are needed. I think we can end here, because nothing has changed since then.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> These memoirs are derived from two separate interviews with Fr Aleksandr Men' conducted in 1978. The interviewer is now a priest and living in the West. The texts were edited and combined by Yakov Krotov (a deacon in the Russian Orthodox Church, a journalist on religious affairs and Dean of the Philosophy and Theology Faculty of the St John the Theologian Russian Orthodox University in Moscow), and translated and further edited at Keston Institute.

(Translated from the Russian by Emma Watkins and Alice Vessey)